

JERUSALEM SCENES

The Hurva Synagogue



Adjacent to the central square of the Jewish Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem an arch of Jerusalem limestone links two parts of the remains of an old building. This is the Hurvah Synagogue, a name derived from the Hebrew word *harev*, 'ruin'. Although we think of the return of the Jews to the land, and to Jerusalem in particular, as being something which began towards the end of the nineteenth century, groups of Jews came to live in Jerusalem in earlier times, and the Hurvah Synagogue has its origins in one such return. In 1700 a large group of Jews from Central and Eastern Europe came to Jerusalem under the leadership of Rabbi Judah Hasid. They borrowed money from local Arabs and built themselves a synagogue and living quarters. Being very poor they were unable to repay the money, and in 1721 the synagogue was burnt down. The ruins were referred to as 'Hurvah Rabbi Judah Hasid', 'The Ruins of Rabbi Judah Hasid', hence the name of the synagogue.

It was not until the early nineteenth century that further groups of Ashkenazi (European) Jews came to live in Jerusalem. The synagogue they initially built was not big enough, and in 1852 the British Jew Sir Moses Montefiore obtained permission from the Turkish authorities to build a much bigger structure on the site of the old Hurvah Synagogue. This was an imposing structure and became the centre of Ashkenazi worship in Jerusalem, although its significance declined during the years of the British mandate as many more Jews came to live outside the Old City. In the 1948 War of Independence Jordan took the Old City and blew up the synagogue. When Israel took the Old City in 1967 it was decided to preserve the ruins and build an arch over them, reaching to the height of the destroyed synagogue, as a symbol of the triumph of the Jews in getting the Jewish Quarter of the Old City back.—*T.B.*